

# HKU03x Humanity and Nature in Chinese Thought

## Week 5: The Early Daoists – Hermits, Shen Dao, and Laozi

### Section 2: Great Dao puzzles: fatalism

- 3 categories of determinism: logical, scientific and fatalistic
- Logical determinism - truths of logic
  - 'A is A' is trivially true no matter what substitutes for A--a matter of logical form
  - Substitutions are: 'What is, is', 'what was, was' and 'what will be, will be'
  - All true, but empty of content. Purely logical truths--compatible with any state of affairs
  - Prescriptive forms (e.g., "Do whatever you are going to do") give you no guidance
  - Shen Dào's determinism has the form of logical determinism
- Scientific determinism – stronger: based on predictability with laws and causation
  - We can predict what will be—what you will do...
  - ...even this is not an obvious threat to free will
- Fatalism - there is nothing you can do to change the future
  - Shen Dào tries to derive fatalism from weak, logical, determinism
- Alternative reading of Shen Dào: the concept of 大道 *dàdào* <sup>the actual way things happen</sup> is irrelevant to normative 是非 *shì-fēi* <sup>this-not that</sup>; no normative judgements follow
- We find our natural criticism of Shen Dào in the *Zhuangzi* itself - this is a *dào* for dead people
  - This is a *dào* that isn't a *dào*—a *dào* that offers no guidance
- Shen Dào didn't understand *dào* but he did have an important insight – Laozi takes it to be abandoning social knowledge